

DESTINATION VIKING

# LIVING HISTORY

## around the Baltic Sea



A guide to Viking sites,  
museums and monuments

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# The Museum of Foteviken

## Scania, Sweden



Foteviken

### Viking-age “towns”

During the early Viking Age, a number of larger, more densely built-up areas arose in Scandinavia. A characteristic of these was probably the important role the king or the religion played in establishing them.

Unfortunately, no written sources exist, which directly give information about these powers; our knowledge therefore has to be based solely on archaeological information. However, the archaeological material poses a problem, as it is somewhat “impersonal”.

Through excavations, the archaeologist is able to discover a host of interesting facts concerning the dating of the buildings, the appearance of the individual dwellings, the existence of handicrafts, the use of different artefacts, and the like. From the excavated archaeological material, important theories can be established concerning the historical development in general, but when it comes to essentials, such as political decisions, human relations and thoughts etc., one is left powerless. It is the written sources alone, which must serve as a guide.

### Small kingdoms

Through the earliest written sources, we know that Scandinavia was ruled by a great number of petty kings during the early Viking Age. For instance, in the peace negotiations between the Danes and Charles the Great in 811, a number of decision-makers are

mentioned, probably kings from the land of the Danes.

When the merchant Wulfstan in the 870s was travelling in the southern part of the Baltic Sea, he refers to an autonomous king ruling the island of Bornholm. During the early 10th century, Haithabu, a large town near Slesvig was under the rule of a king and his sons, who originated from the land of the Swedes far away to the north.

If we are to believe the written sources, it was not until the reign of Harald Finehair, towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, that the first efforts were made to unify the many small provinces of Norway to become a joint kingdom. However, it took more than a century before a more stable power structure was established.

The conditions in Sweden are much more difficult to interpret and understand. The early written sources are very poor compared to those of the other Scandinavian countries. However, there is a very valuable preserved manuscript, *The Vita Ansgari* (The Life of Ansgar), written by Rimbert, about Ansgar's missionary work in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In it there is a lot of information about the peninsula of Jutland in Denmark and Birka situated in the Lake Mälaren region of Sweden. However, other parts of Scandinavia are not mentioned at all in this saga.

There are, however, no doubts about the fact that Sweden consisted of a number of small kingdoms during this period. The so-



*The Viking Reserve at Foteviken. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

called Ynglinga Saga, although chronicled much later, describes the history of Central Sweden during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. This saga tells the story of the mighty kings who ruled in Uppsala and also about kings in Värmland and in Södermanland, situated far to the west and south of Uppsala respectively. The saga also tells about the kings of the province of Viken, i.e. the present-day Oslo fjord in southern Norway.

Even today one of the counties in Sweden is called Småland, meaning the small lands or realms. In this well-forested wilderness, no less than twelve small provinces once existed, each one probably ruled by a king or nobleman. It is interesting to note that at least up until the 16th century, the minor islands in southern Denmark were also called the small lands. This too is an example of minor kingdoms during the Viking Age and earlier periods.

Up until the early Viking Age, the countries we refer to today as Sweden, Denmark and Norway were divided up into a number of autonomous provinces. A political base for larger town-like settlements did not exist.

### **The earliest town-like settlements**

Haithabu and Ribe are among the earliest town-like settlements in Scandinavia.

Haithabu was the most important commercial town in Denmark during the Viking Age. The earliest buildings date back to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a gigantic semi-circular earthwork was erected around the town.

Apart from these towns, other settlements worth mentioning include the large trading centres of Kaupang in southern Norway, Köpingsvik on the island of Öland and Paviken on the island of Gotland.

In the early Viking Age, special small international market towns, so-called "köpingar" existed in Scania. No less than six such market towns were situated along the coast of Scania. At two of these settlements archaeological investigations have been conducted resulting in the dating of the building remains. These settlements were occupied from early 9<sup>th</sup> century to early 11<sup>th</sup> century and probably functioned as temporary

settlements, in connection with annual markets and the like.

### The unified kingdom of Denmark

During the reign of King Harald Bluetooth (940-986) a unified kingdom called Denmark, is created or at least consolidated.

Apart from the areas belonging to present-day Denmark, this kingdom also comprised western and southern Scania, the present Swedish west coast and the area around the Oslo fjord, the so-called province of Viken.

The king had conquered these areas. The number of "Trelleborgs" bears witness to this fact. These were special circular fortresses, which could house powerful garrisons. All of the fortresses are situated at strategic sites.

These fortresses also seem to feature a Christian church dedicated to Saint Clemens, situated just outside the earthworks.

According to the large rune stone in Jelling, King Harald Bluetooth also boasts to have converted the Danes to Christianity.

Many of the trelleborgs have been known for a long time. However, other possible fortresses could also be located in Copenhagen, Lund, Helsingborg, Laholm and Oslo as all of these cities feature early Saint Clemens churches, situated next to possible fortress sites. For instance, Saint Clemens church in Oslo is the earliest wooden church in the city with graves dating from the 980s. This corresponds well with the construction period of the trelleborgs and the testimonies of the written sources concerning the political ambitions of Harald Bluetooth in this area.

**Town-like settlements in the late Viking Age**  
Concerning town-like settlements in late Viking-age Denmark, then Viborg, Aarhus, Roskilde, Helsingborg and Lund are all worth mentioning.

Lund appears to have replaced Uppåkra. The archaeological evidence indicates that this

was most likely carried out on the orders of Harald Bluetooth.

In Norway, Kaupang disappeared and became replaced by settlements such as Sarpsborg and Oslo. Further to the north, Trondheim developed into a very important town, not least following the death of Olof Digre in the year 1030. He was buried in the town and also canonised here.

In Sweden, Birka disappeared and was replaced by the town known as Sigtuna.

On the island of Gotland the little market town Paviken was succeeded by Västergarn, featuring a semi-circular earthwork. However, already after a short period this town was outdistanced by the early Visby, situated on the coast a little further north.

In the inland regions of Central Sweden, Skara developed into an important town in the county of Västergötland. Probably Linköping, in the county of Östergötland, also dates back to the late Viking Age as this town is situated in the centre of an area of great importance during the Viking era.

### The Viking Reserve at Foteviken

The Museum of Foteviken is situated in the far southwest corner of modern-day Sweden. The so-called Viking Reserve belongs to the museum. It is a unique place for "Living History" featuring the Viking-age town as the major theme.

The area covers some 70,000 square metres and it is situated on a historical shore with a spectacular view overlooking the Bay of Höllviken and the Bay of Foteviken.

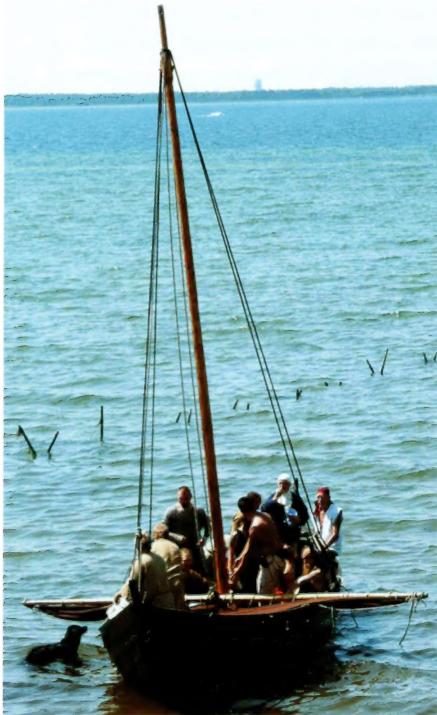
The Viking Reserve was founded in 1996. Today it is the only reconstructed historical site in Scandinavia, which represents a full scale Viking Age town.

## A historical site

The Viking Reserve is located on an extremely interesting historical site.

On the other side of Höllviken Bay lies Skanör. From the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century, this little town with its annual herring market was the biggest international place of congregation in northern Europe during the months of August and September. Before this period, the market was located on the other side of the large bay, in the area where the Viking Reserve is situated today. This marketplace is mentioned in the year of 1134, but is probably much older.

In the area next to the Viking Reserve, there was once a field called the minor Vi field (the field of the minor sacrificial grove). A Vi



*A Viking ship at Foteviken. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

was a pagan sacrificial grove before Christianity was introduced in Scania about AD 970. Here once stood a holy grove or pagan temple. However, when King Harald Bluetooth later conquered Scania, Christianity was introduced. The sacrificial grove was probably destroyed and the king ordered a wooden church to be built a couple of hundred metres away to the north.

At the same time, the Bay of Foteviken probably became a winter harbour for the Scanian war fleet. In order to protect this fleet, King Harald ordered the construction of a 300-metre long underwater stone barrier at the mouth of the bay. The king also constructed a State demesne and probably founded the small village of Lilla Hammar, situated near the Viking Reserve.

## A reconstructed small Viking town

As a visitor to the Viking Reserve, you encounter a small town, as it would have looked 900 years ago, and some of its inhabitants.

The town is situated near the shore and protected by a high semi-circular earthwork, open towards the shore. Semi-circular earthworks such as these were erected around several Viking Age towns.

A difficult problem when reconstructing these town earthworks is not knowing what the wooden palisade, which once stood on top of the earthworks, actually looked like. Since such a wooden construction is such a dominant feature, it is important that it does not turn the whole construction into a scene of theatrical fantasy. In the Viking Reserve it was decided to opt for a simple wooden-fence on top of earthworks of the type that existed long ago.

You enter the town via the southern gateway. A long main street runs parallel with the shore and from it narrow streets and lanes run into the settlement.

Although only about twenty houses have



*The Viking Reserve at Foteviken. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

been erected, you even now get a sense of the cramped conditions in the town. The houses lie close together in rows along the narrow alleyways. The dwelling houses are located along the main street, and behind them lay the farm buildings. A large cookhouse can also be found along one of the alleyways, situated behind one of the dwelling houses and its rear building.

### **The buildings**

There is an important difference between the Viking Reserve and other prehistoric centres. The buildings at the Viking Reserve are not exact replicas of any that have been discovered at various archaeological excavations.

Usually only minor fragments are preserved from the excavated buildings, which makes

reconstruction using only one building as a model very difficult to accomplish. Instead, it was decided to incorporate different details from a number of excavated Viking-age buildings at Foteviken.

The reconstructions are also based upon factual material, regarding the appearance of buildings that can be found in a great number of preserved written sources of the period.

In this way, the buildings at the Viking Reserve do not become monuments of archaeological excavations. Instead, they can be altered and extended, in just the same dynamic way that actually took place once upon a time.

### **A living history settlement**

You are now standing in the centre of a small

town from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. A number of craftsmen work here and a king and a juror reside here. The town even has its own bishop.

Christianity was introduced in the area as early as the end of 10<sup>th</sup> century and now, a little more than one hundred years later, the construction of the great stone cathedral in the town of Lund is in progress, just forty kilometres to the north of Foteviken.

Some people however have not yet forgotten about the old heathen gods. Located outside the town earthworks, is a sacrificial grove with three sculptures, which represent the famous Norse gods Thor, Odin and Frey. As a visitor, you are actually allowed to make an offering to these three gods.

### An independent state

The Viking Reserve has been proclaimed an independent state for the international Viking re-enactment movement.

Every summer, a large number of Vikings come and stay in the Viking Reserve. These people take a great interest in re-enactment activities. They dress up in costumes of the period, live in Viking tents and travel around Europe in the summer, in order to meet and mix with people with a similar interest. In Europe today there are many thousands of people who are dedicated to this inspirational cultural phenomenon.

It has also become popular to stage personal celebrations in the Viking Reserve. You can get married by the juror who is licensed to perform civil marriages. It is even possible to get married in the heathen way for those wishing to do so, as there is a pagan priest, a godi, available.

A “knee-setting” ceremony can be held for your newborn child. This is the pagan equivalent to the Christian baptism.

### The laws of the Viking Reserve

As a “Viking” you are entitled to free access to

the Viking Reserve, on the condition that you pledge to obey the special laws of the Viking Reserve. These laws prescribe that no discrimination is permitted on the grounds of sex, religion or nationality.

The international Viking re-enactment movement is like one large family and Foteviken is one of their many meeting places in Europe today.

### How to get there

The Museum of Foteviken is situated 20 km south of Malmö. As you come to the edge of Höllviken, just follow the road signs to “Vikingamuseet”.

### Further information

Fotevikens Museum  
Museivägen 24  
Box 82,  
SE-236 22 Höllviken.  
Phone: +46 (0)40-330 800  
Fax: +46 (0)40-330 819  
Email: [info@foteviken.se](mailto:info@foteviken.se)  
[www.foteviken.se](http://www.foteviken.se)

### Opening hours

The Viking Reserve is open:  
May 12–September 12: weekdays 10am to 4pm.  
June 15–August 24: daily 10am to 4pm

## Places of interest in the vicinity

### 1. King Harald's fortress in Trelleborg

About twenty kilometres from Foteviken on the south coast of Scania, lies the city of Trelleborg. Here archaeologists have discovered the remains of a large circular fortress, a “trelleborg”, dating back to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.



*The reconstructed wooden ramparts of the fortress in Trelleborg. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

The fortress consists of high circular earthworks with a wooden palisade on the outer facing side, constructed on the shore of the period. The fortress had four gateways.

Unfortunately, no remains of the original buildings were discovered in the archaeological excavations of the site, but remains of medieval houses were found.

Today, one quarter of the fortress and even a 14th century house, which stands inside the fortress area, have been reconstructed.

These types of fortresses are generally known as “trelleborgs” and there are many examples in Denmark. Using dendrochronology, it has been established that these fortresses were constructed in the 980s, during the reign of the Danish king, Harald Bluetooth.

The trelleborgs were most likely garrisons for the king's mercenaries, used to make him sole ruler of Denmark. A church was also erected outside each trelleborg. In this way, the king could draw attention to the fact that the country had abandoned the old pagan religion.



*A reconstructed part of the fortress in Trelleborg. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

#### **How to get there**

The fortress is situated in the centre of Trelleborg. There are signs on the main road running along the shore.



*From the archaeological excavations at Uppåkra. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

## 2. Uppåkra

### The church village

The church village of Uppåkra is situated just to the south of the Viking-age town of Lund, on the southern side of the little Höje River. The area has a high country character, overlooking the Scanian flat lands. The church in Uppåkra is rather modern, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is located on the same site as the medieval stone church and probably the first wooden church from the Viking Age.

Next to the church is the ancient country road across the fertile plains of Lund and Söderslätt. This road runs parallel with the coast, some miles inland. A great number of Bronze-age barrows are found along the road, particularly to the south of Malmö, which indicates that the road already existed three

thousand years ago. Adjacent to the road and next to the church are two preserved barrows. Archaeological excavations have established the existence of a third barrow that disappeared when the road was rerouted.

The so-called “three-barrows market” was celebrated during the Middle Ages in Lund. Scholars are of the opinion that this market existed even before the founding of Lund, in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. Uppåkra is probably the place that the old market name refers to.

### Cultural stratum

An extensive so-called cultural stratum (or layer) covers the church village of Uppåkra. A cultural stratum consists of soil containing the remains of human activities such as house fragments, artefacts, coal and waste products.

In large areas, the stratum is between a half to one metre deep, due to the original terrain.

Depressions in the ground level filled up more quickly than areas situated at a higher level.

By using a metal detector, an enormous amount of artefacts have been found on the surface of this cultural stratum. The finds date from AD 100 to the Viking Age.

It now seems that Uppåkra was abandoned when Lund was founded in the 970, during the reign of Harald Bluetooth.

### A wooden temple

The remains of a probable wooden temple have also been unearthed. This discovery is quite unique and it gives an idea of how worship was conducted in this pagan religion. The actual building is quite small. Four massive pillars formed a high central room, the sacred room of the temple. Archaeologists found a beautiful glass beaker and a gold decorated metal goblet buried in the flooring of the room.

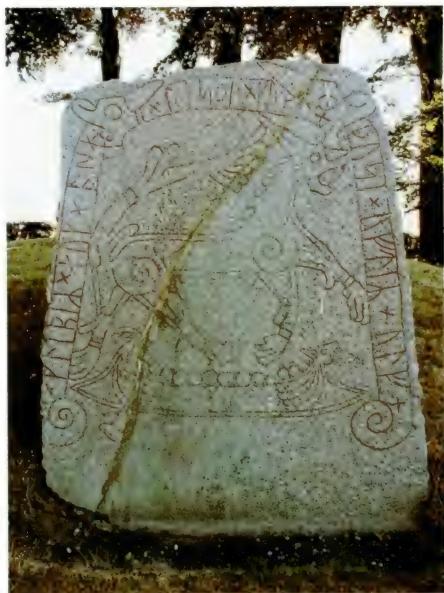
### How to get there

The church of Uppåkra is situated to the south of Lund. There are information signs near the church.

## 3. The runestone of Tullstorp

The church of Tullstorp is situated on top of a hill, several miles from the south coast of Scania. On a clear day, the sea is visible to the south. In the churchyard stands a remarkable runestone. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the runestone was broken into two parts and lay embedded in the churchyard wall.

The nearly two-metre high runestone has the following inscription: "Kleppe and Åse erected these cairns on behalf of Ulf". It depicts two images, a ship and an animal. The animal is the so-called "great animal", featuring the characteristic spirals between the



*The Tullstorp stone. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

body and the legs, with pointed ears and a tail with crests.

The depicted ship is quite remarkable. It features animal heads at the prow and the stern, the steering-oar is visible on the side and a number of circular shields are hanging along the railing. However, the high sides, as well as the rams fitted to the bow and the stern, did not exist on Viking ships. This construction is completely impossible for a Scandinavian Viking ship as these ships were of a lighter construction. Ships equipped with a ram require very heavy hulls, in order to create sufficient kinetic energy required to crush an enemy ship.

Almost identical ships are depicted on seven other runestones in Denmark as well as in the county of Östergötland, about four hundred kilometres to the north, in Sweden. The ships are most likely so-called "dromons",



*Sunrise at Ale's stones. Photo The Museum of Foteviken.*

i.e. warships common to the east Roman emperor. The runestones featuring these motives date back to the 960-970s. They were most likely erected in memory of the people who had been in the service of the emperor of Constantinople (called Miklagård by the Vikings).

#### How to get there

The Tullstorp church is situated about 20 km northwest of Trelleborg. The Runestone is located in the eastern part of the cemetery.

#### 4. The stones of Ale

One of the most romanticised, intriguing and magnificent ancient monuments in Scania is the ship-shaped stone setting of Ale at Kåseberga. Situated on top of a prominent high ridge, which drops abruptly down to the sea, is a 67-metre long stone ship comprising 58 erect stones.

In 1624 this ancient monument is

mentioned as "Als stones". For centuries it has undergone severe damage. A picture dating back to 1777 clearly shows that even then several stones had fallen to the ground, and in 1801 no less than 18 stones had fallen. In 1916 the monument was "restored". The stones were raised and ten new stones were erected, replacing those that had been lost.

In the 1970s the first theories interpreting the stones of Ale as some kind of aid for prehistoric astronomic calculations emerged. This theory spread rapidly. Unfortunately, the discussions concerning the stones of Ale have not always been serious. Many important facts have too often been excluded in order to create better conditions for the theories presented.

An attempt has also been made to conceal the fact that from the beginning several stone ships were located on this site. As late as the 1870s, the remains of two other stone ships were visible, positioned on either side of the large one.

Thus, there is no doubt that the stones of Ale are the remains of a large prehistoric burial site. Stones were scarce in these parts



and the stones from ancient monuments were often taken and used as building material.

It is probably only due to the size and, of course, the legends connected with this burial site, that have helped to preserve parts of the large stone ship until the present.

Using the carbon-14 method on charcoal remains found beneath and around the stones; the site has now been dated to a period between AD 540-980. This period corresponds well with the dating of similar ship-shaped stone settings in southern Scandinavia. Thus, the stones of Ale are a "memorial site", an ancient place where the dead were buried or cremated.

#### How to get there

The stones of Ale are situated at the coast way between Ystad and Simrishamn. Signs at the road show the way down to Kåseberga harbour and the monument is situated nearby.

## 5. The Viking Age in Lund

### Kulturen i Lund

#### - The Museum of Cultural History

Situated in the centre of Lund lies a rarity in terms of the Scandinavian Viking Age, namely the Museum of Cultural History (Kulturen). This museum was founded in the late 19th century and already at that time there was a great interest in archaeological excavations of the old town centre.

The town was founded by King Harald Bluetooth in the 960-970s. Extensive cultural strata, at some places as much as six metres deep, cover the central parts of the town. The conditions for preserving organic materials such as wood, cloth, leather etc. are exceptionally good. This has resulted in one of the most extensive collections of Viking-age artefacts in the world.

In one of the permanent exhibitions of the museum entitled "Metropolis", the visitor can make a journey through one thousand years in the town. Great emphasis has been given to the earliest part of the history. Unique artefacts are exhibited, giving a rich and varied



picture of a Viking-age and early medieval town.

#### Further information

Kulturen  
Tegnérsplassen  
Box 1095  
221 04 Lund  
Phone: +46 (0)46 350 400  
[www.kulturen.com](http://www.kulturen.com)

#### Opening hours

15 April–15 September: 11 a.m.–5 p.m.  
16 September–14 April: 12 noon–4 p.m.,  
closed Mondays



Runestones at Kulturen in Lund. Photo: The Museum of Foteviken.

#### Runestones

In the garden of the museum, a number of famous runestones are exhibited, moved here from various sites in Scania.

Yet another special collection, referred to as “runestone hill”, is located on the University square, about one hundred metres north of the cathedral.

A further five hundred metres to the north, the largest runestone in Scandinavia can be found indoors, in the reception area of the University Library.

#### The Historical Museum

On exhibition at the Historical Museum, situated between the cathedral and the Museum of Cultural History, are interesting artefact collections from the entire prehistoric period of Scania. Naturally, artefacts from the

Viking Age are also on display here, including the unique discoveries made during the archaeological excavations at Uppåkra.

### Further information

The Historical Museum

Kraftstorg 1

SE-223 50 Lund

Phone: +46 (0)46 222 79 44

[www.luhm.lu.se](http://www.luhm.lu.se)

### Lund Cathedral

King Harald Bluetooth conquered extensive parts of Scania during the 970s and at the same time forcefully introduced Christianity in the region. A hundred years later, written sources mention three hundred churches in the county of Scania alone.

In the 1050s two bishoprics had been established in Scania, one in Lund and the other in Dalby, 15 kilometres to the east. During the period of the powerful bishop and missionary Egino, these two dioceses were united and became one major bishopric. Thus Lund was to become the leading ecclesiastical centre of Scandinavia.

As early as the reign of King Sven

Estridsen, in the mid 11th century, the first stone church was constructed in Lund. In the reign of his son Knut the Holy in the 1080s, economical possibilities were created for the building of a new cathedral.

The Danes had been struggling for a long time to establish an archbishop in Lund. As Scandinavia was part of the Hamburg-Bremen archdiocese, the intention for the pope was to approve of this new order. In 1103 the Danes were successful. However, by then the construction of the new cathedral in Lund had already been in progress for many years.

The cathedral of Lund is Scandinavia's most magnificent Romanesque style building. Its construction began in the 1080s and continued until the early Middle Ages, to 1145.

The earliest part of the cathedral is the immense crypt, located beneath the high altar. In this crypt, the famous sculpture known as Finn can be found. It is a human-like being embracing a stone column, which originally probably stood elsewhere, most likely in the first bishopric church, which was built during the reign of King Sven Estridsen - thus making Finn a "genuine" Viking.



Stone sculptures.  
Lund Cathedral.  
Photo:  
The Museum of  
Foteviken.